

# Monday Bulletin

## On Services to Youth

To Coordinate ... To Enhance ... To Serve ... Through Communication

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## Michigan Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF) 2008 Was a Big Hit!

By Cynthia Wright



MYLF 2008 Delegates and Staff at the State Capitol

From exposure to assistive technology, making new friends, laughing at the antics of a comic, cheering at a Lansing Lugnuts game, visiting the Capitol, learning about how government works, posing with politicians and the Stanley Cup, role playing, to dancing to tunes of Beatles and Elvis impersonators, the MYLF 2008 was a big hit this summer for 25 future leaders with disabilities. The MYLF refers to participants as "delegates", because each participant is considered a representative of their home community and is expected to return to their community after the MYLF experience prepared to make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others with disabilities. Delegates are encouraged to pursue their dreams, seek meaningful employment and contribute to society in a positive way.

ers with disabilities. Delegates are encouraged to pursue their dreams, seek meaningful employment and contribute to society in a positive way.

From June 22nd to the 26th, delegates from all over Michigan came together at Michigan State University for the MYLF experience. The MYLF was housed in West Holmes Hall for five steamy, adventure-packed summer days where young people learned about self advocacy, ADA, civil rights, government and each other with the guidance of MYLF mentors and staff. At the final luncheon at the Kellogg Center, it's a tradition that the delegates share what they gained from participating in the MYLF. Listening to the comments, it quickly became apparent this program was a life changing experience for many of the delegates.

Delegates enjoyed visits during the week from a variety of people who not only gave them information and inspiration, but entertained them as well. This year the delegates heard from **Keith Cooley, Director of Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth** who spent hours meeting with delegates, talking with them about leadership and encouraging them to pursue their dreams. Other visitors included Virginia Martz from Michigan State University; Jeff Sykes from Grand Valley State University; Michael Ellis from MEE Inc; Dan Vivian, Chair of MYLF and Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns (MCDC) Chairperson; Duncan Wyeth, MCDC Executive Director; Elise Konkol, 2006 MYLF Student Reflections; Ann Jacob from the Disability Network in Flint; Marlene Malloy, Executive Director of the Michigan Rehabilitation Council; Valarie Barnum-Yarger, Executive Director of the Michigan Statewide Independent Living Council; Christine Reiff from Michigan Department of Education, Office of Career and Technical Education; Eric Turkaleski from the Disability Network in Southwest Michigan; former Michigan State Representative Doug Spade; former Legislative Assistant Mike Clement; Dr. Mary Kelly from MCDC; Gerry Mutty, former MCDC Executive Director; and lobbyist Sandi Lewis.

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## Michigan Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF) 2008 Was a Big Hit!

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Staff from agencies serving persons with disabilities provided information and visited with the delegates during an evening session. Organizations represented included Michigan State University's Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, Michigan Works! Association, AmeriCorps, Social Security Administration and the Michigan Commission for the Blind.

As hard as the delegates work, they also play and have fun. Entertainment was provided by Dwayne Gill, "Comedy Cop", Yellow Submarines and on the last night, a D.J. for a Hawaiian luau. Joe Skupin and Lou Aquino from Michigan Rehabilitation Services performed their "What Not to Do When Applying for a Job" act which was a fun way to learn the art of getting a job by exaggerating what not to do.

Certainly the highlight of the week for most of the delegates was the visit to the Capitol, which this year also included a photo op with the Stanley Cup! The delegates got a chance to see Michigan government in action and met many state representatives and senators. They also created a mock bill from their experience as students with disabilities, divided into pro and con groups and debated the bill.

The guest speaker at the luncheon on the last day was Cheryl Angelelli, who competed in this year's Paralympics Games in Beijing, China, not only winning two silver medals, but swimming personal bests in both events. She is a world swimming Champion and an American record holder. She previously won two bronze medals from the Paralympics Games in Sydney, Australia in 2004. Cheryl's story is one of facing adversity and succeeding despite challenges that life presents. Cheryl was an inspirational and graceful speaker for the delegates and guests at the luncheon.

All in all the MYLF offered a wonderful growth and learning opportunity and is a great way to open doors, minds and hearts of young people with disabilities.



MYLF 2008 Delegates and staff pose with the Stanley Cup



MYLF 2008 Delegate Markita Terry and House Speaker Andy Dillon

### MYLF Celebrates its 10th Birthday—How to Apply

*By Cynthia Wright*

Summer 2009 will be the 10<sup>th</sup> year for the Michigan Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF). June 14 – 18, 2009 are the dates saved and West Holmes Hall at Michigan State University will once again host the MYLF. **The deadline for applications is December 12, 2008.** Applications are attached to the Monday Bulletin for your convenience and can be duplicated. Applications are also available at Commission for Disability Concerns, Centers for Independent Living, Michigan Office of Special Education, Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services, Michigan Rehabilitation Services and Michigan Commission for the Blind.

The MYLF is for high school students who will be juniors and seniors by September of 2009, in other words, students must currently be in at least 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Students must not be older than 19 at the time of the forum. Students must reside in Michigan, have a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and have demonstrated leadership potential

in their communities and schools.

Up to 35 students with disabilities will be able to participate. If more than 35 students apply, there will be a selection process. Because of this possibility, take care when completing applications to make sure that student potential is well articulated.

All disabilities can be accommodated at the MYLF including students who require personal care attendants and interpreters. Once accepted into the MYLF, students will complete additional paperwork where they can clearly request accommodations that they will need.

**There is no charge for attendance as all of the costs are provided through donations.** The 10<sup>th</sup> year of the MYLF will provide students with an innovative, exciting leadership development opportunity.

# MYLF Student Testimonial

By Nick Vanderwall

My Name is Nick VanderWall. I am 18 and a high school senior at Mason County Central. I have been blind for six years and when I went to MYLF I thought it would be a week that I would never get back. I couldn't have been more wrong! It was informative, fun and I made a lot of new friends. I learned many things that would help me with transitioning from high school to college. For example, that you have to be your own self advocate in getting what you need. Also I learned about the laws that can help you get or keep your job through the ADA. MYLF was not just about learning, although that was the main goal. We had fun as well. Every night we had an activity that was fun like a dance, comedian, or a music group. My favorite thing that we did was touring the Capitol, and being able to see and touch the

Stanley Cup that the Red Wings had won earlier that year. The week at MYLF was an experience that I'll never forget, and I hope I can go back next year.

*Nick is from Ludington, Michigan. He plans to attend a community college close to home to start his college education and eventually transfer to Western Michigan University where he plans to earn a degree in communication. Nick's ultimate dream is to create a TV show about disabled hunting and fishing called "Disabled Outdoors".*



**L-R: Rep. David Palsrok; Nick Vanderwall; Senator Gerald VanWoerkom**

# MYLF Student Testimonial

By Mike (Roy) Erhart

During my time at the Michigan Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF) we learned a lot about how self-advocating can greatly affect the resources that are put at our disposal. First and foremost we were taught about advocating on the job. This involved a skit about a job interview and a few guest speakers that really gave us some good insight about life in the working world. We were informed that employers tend only to accommodate people with noticeable disabilities and not people that have less obvious disabilities unless they speak up.



**Mike (Roy) Erhart with Rep. Mike Lahti**

Along with all the work we had free time too. We sat and talked, occasionally ordered pizza if we felt like it, and played Frisbee with each other along with the program assistants.

Actually, the coolest thing we did at MYLF was learn about advocating in government. We created a bill and debated and voted on it at the capitol building! The bill ended up failing to pass but it was still really cool to sit in seats that are used by members of the legislature.

Since MYLF I have decided to stop walking in the shadow of people who think I'm an ordinary teen. Meeting all of the people at MYLF taught me that I don't have to hide my disability from the world. I want people to know that I

have a disability and that it doesn't stop me from doing anything that they can do. If you know someone that has a disability, no matter how small, then encourage them to sign up for MYLF because my life has done a complete 180 since I attended this program and it has done amazing things for my self-confidence.

*Mike Erhart prefers to be called Roy and is a junior from Iron River High School in Iron River Michigan in the Upper Peninsula. He plans to attend Western Michigan University and is hoping to become a low vision mobility specialist. Roy loves to hunt and proudly has "dropped" a deer each year for the last two, despite the fact that he is legally blind.*

## William Milzarski Leads the Way for the MYLF

By Cynthia Wright

*The student was amazed and said, "I didn't know people in wheelchairs could be an attorney".*

William Milzarski of the Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns has been the coordinator and head fundraiser for the Michigan Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF) for the past 5 years. Cheryl Mattson, from MCDC assists William in planning for and hosting the MYLF. They have seen many young people with disabilities come to MYLF with trepidation and leave with positive feelings about themselves, their peers and the world around them.

William served in the United States Army during the Persian Gulf War and is a disabled veteran. Once on SSDI, William is now a successful attorney possessing both a social work and law degree. Not only does William serve as the coordinator for the MYLF, he also is an expert on ADA and works as a state mediator.

The MYLF costs \$1500 per student and sufficiently raising all the donations to fully cover costs is an ongoing and daunting task. Mentors and many others who staff the MYLF volunteer their time to reduce costs. The major donors for the summer 2008 forum were the Dow Chemical Foundation, Peckham, Inc. and General Motors Corporation. Supplies and gifts are also donated from a variety of sources.

Something William would love to see more of in the future is the MYLF written into more IEPs and IPEs by schools, Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) staff and Michigan Commission for the Blind (MCB) staff. He believes this would help school staff, MRS and MCB counselors, families and students better understand the value of the MYLF experience. His hope is that increased awareness will further legitimize the MYLF and result in increased funding so the MYLF becomes a possibility for more young people. Presently, funds allow only about 35 students to benefit each year.

During the MYLF, William has seen many young people experience "epiphanies" and leave changed and empowered. William states, "One of the greatest things young people experience at the MYLF is that all the mentors are successful people with disabilities." Mentors come from a variety of agencies that serve people with disabilities and are often previous graduates of the program. The process of selecting the mentors is challenging because so many people offer to give their time to be a part of the MYLF.

Sometimes, William requires the assistance of a wheelchair to get around. He remembers with a smile the young student who came up to him at the MYLF and asked him if he was really an attorney. The student was amazed and said, "I didn't know people in wheelchairs could be an attorney". Realizations such as this are critical when young people with disabilities are formulating who they are, what they want to do and what they can do. It is moments like this that compels William to make the MYLF all that it can be and to work to expand the program to reach more students.

## My Space Leadership Program—The Disability Network (A Local YLF)

By Jessica McNair

The Disability Network in Flint responded to the needs of students with disabilities in Genesee County by developing a 4 day leadership training academy patterned after the Michigan Youth Leadership Forum. This program has taken place during the summer of 2007 and summer of 2008. The first year we had 4 forums which served 37 students. The diligence of the staff at The Disability Network paid off. The second year we increased to 7 forums which served 121 students.

The Myspace Leadership program takes place over 4 days. Each day focuses on building leadership skills and making connections with other students with disabilities throughout Genesee County.

It is fun to watch a student from a rural area such as Lakeville bond with a student from the Flint Schools. The students begin the week not wanting to talk to each other and end the week exchanging phone numbers and email addresses.

The first day of the program, the students meet at The Disability Network to learn about the Americans with Disabilities Act. They also learn about being active in their Individual Education Plan and other grass roots groups like ADAPT. The second day, the students meet at Genesee County's Michigan Works! One Stop, Career Alliance.

## National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN) - National Voice for Young Leaders with Disabilities

By Cynthia Wright

The first National Conference for youth with disabilities in Washington DC was a process that began in 1997 and led to what the National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN) is today – a youth led network dedicated to advancing the next generation of disability leaders.

The mission of the NYLN is: “To promote youth leadership and education. We teach young people how to advocate. Our goal is to make sure that young people with disabilities have the chance to set and reach their own goals.” The NYLN does this by:

- Promoting leadership development, education, employment, independent living, and health and wellness among young leaders representing the diversity of race, ethnicity and disability in the United States.
- Fostering the inclusion of young leaders with disabilities into all aspects of society at national, state and local levels.
- Communicating about issues important to youth with disabilities and the policies and practices that affect their lives.

NYLN assists young adults through various resources and outreach efforts. Some specific goals include the following:

- An annual youth leadership conference.
- Quarterly national webcast calls specifically designed for young people with disabilities to communicate with one another and learn more about topics and issues selected by young adults themselves.

- Annual youth-directed research projects collect and communicate information about policies, services, and issues important to young people with disabilities.
- Quarterly newsletters with stories, profiles, and resources specifically focused around needs, accomplishments, and resources of / for young people with disabilities.
- A link for the public to young adults with disabilities who serve as speakers, presenters, committee members, etc. for national, state, and community organizations looking for insight from the young adult community.
- Outreach to involve, educate, and support young leaders across the country in achieving their personal leadership goals and in serving their communities.

Recently the NYLN received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD), to create the nation’s first youth-led national Youth Information Center (YIC). The goal of YIC is to serve as a national vehicle for youth to express themselves and for their voices to be heard.

To learn more about the National Youth Information Center or other Youth Information Centers that may be in your area, check out these websites: <http://www.addyic.org/Resources.htm> or <http://www.addyic.org/>

## My Space Leadership Program—The Disability Network Continued from page 4

This day they perform skits demonstrating the first 3 titles of the ADA and learn how to build a resume and enter it on the Michigan Talent Bank. The third day, the students meet at the University of Michigan Flint. They tour the campus, meet admissions advisors, and tour Disability Services. On the last day, they wrap up at the Disability Network while meeting local leaders with disabilities, and then the students get to vote on a leisure activity to do together like bowling.

The students are given a stipend of \$100 to attend the training. Many will tell other students that they came just for the money, but in the end learned a lot and would come again for free. Each week students from the previous weeks who exhibit good leadership skills are chosen to be student mentors. We have seen many of these students grow into good leaders.

The collaboration between MRS and The Disability Network made this program possible. It has impacted many students and has increased referrals of new students to our school-to-work program. The students that demonstrate good leadership skills have the opportunity to participate in Myspace II which is voluntary. The students have developed a PowerPoint presentation to educate other students and school personnel about the rights of students with disabilities and have shown it to one school and will continue with more this fall.

## Save the Dates

### October

Universal Design Policy Forum Webinar  
*Policy Barriers to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Implementation will be discussed*

October 6, 2008

Registration Information is available at:

<http://www.projectforum.org/>

Association for Children's Mental Health (ACMH) Annual Conference

*The Family Express: Turn Your Passion Into Action*

Scholarships available

October 13-14, 2008

Holiday Inn West, Lansing

<http://www.acmh-mi.org>

Learning Disabilities Association of Michigan Conference

October 26-28, 2008

East Lansing, MI

<http://www.ldaofmichigan.org/calendar.htm>

### November

Michigan Association of Learning Disabilities Educators  
*Alphabet Soup: The Answers Lie Within Research Based Interventions*

November 3-4, 2008

Comfort Inn, Mt. Pleasant, MI

Monica Harris: [monica.harris@wmich.edu](mailto:monica.harris@wmich.edu)

T.L. Lowe: [tlowe@cooperville.k12.mi.us](mailto:tlowe@cooperville.k12.mi.us)

Michigan Rehabilitation Conference

November 5-7, 2008

Acme, MI

<http://michiganrehabilitationconference.org>

<http://www.maro.org/>

Michigan Pre-College and Youth Outreach Conference

*Building Youth Assets as a Long-Term Strategy Toward a Better MI*

November 21, 2008

Michigan State University, East Lansing

<http://outreach.msu.edu/events/precollege/about.asp>

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